

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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R 231300Z SEP 76
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9254
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEHRAN 9632

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, LE
SUB: LEBANESE SITUATION

1. LEBANSES AMBASSADOR AL-KHALIL, WHO HAS JUST RETURNED FROM A THREE-WEEK VISIT TO LEBANON, ASKED DCM TO MEET HIM EVENING OF SEPTEMBER 22. IN THE COURSE OF THE CONVERSATION WHICH ENSUED, KHALIL MADE THE FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS WHICH MAY BE OF INTEREST TO EMBASSY BEIRUT AND THE DEPARTMENT.

2. AS ADDRESSEES ARE AWARE, KHALIL IS FROM A PROMINENT SOUTH LEBANESE FAMILY, AND HE SPOKE FIRST OF THE SITUATION IN SOUTH LABANON. HE SAID THAT THE SHIA COMMUNITY THERE IS NOW TOTALLY ALIENATED FROM THE PALESTINIANS WHO HAVE TREATED THE LOCAL POPOLATION WITH TOTAL ARROGANCE AND CONTEMPT. KHALIL CITED A NUMBER OF EXAMPLES, INCLUDING EXPROPRIATION OF PROPERTY, DEMANDS FOR BUSINESS PROFITS, AND RANDOM KILLINGS FOR REAL OR IMAGINED SLIGHTS. AS A RESULT, THE SHIAS OF SOUTH LEBANON HAVE DETERMINED THAT THEY MUST OUST THE PALESTINIANS FROM THEIR MIDST BY FORCE OF ARMS IF NECESSARY. APPARENTLY, KHALIL AND MEMBERS OF OTHER WELL-KNOWN SOUTH LEBANESE FAMILIES, INCLUDING ASAD, HAVE TALKED TO FRANGIE AND CHAMOUN ABOUT THIS AND, CONTRARY TO THE PAST, FIND A WILLINGNESS ON THE PART OF THESE TWO LEADERS TO COOPERATE IN THE COMMON OBJECTIVE OF ERADICATING PALESTINIAN PRESENCE OR AT LEAST INFLUENCE FROM LEBANON.

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3. KHALIL SAID THAT IN THE PAST THE FRANGIE-CHAMOUN FACTION WAS

UNWILLING TO GIVE THE SOUTH LEBANESE ANY ASSISTANCE OR EVEN SELL THEM ARMS TO HELP THEM DEFEND THEMSELVES FROM THE PALESTINIANS. NOW THEY ARE EAGER TO DO SO. WHILE BEING RATHER CAREFUL ABOUT THE DETAILS OF HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH FRANGIE AND CHAMOUN, KHALIL LEFT THE IMPRESSION THAT A RATHER DETAILED PLAN OF COOPERATION WAS DISCUSSED AND AGREED UPON IN WHICH THE SOUTH LEBANESE WOULD TAKE UP ARMS WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS TO PUSH THE PALESTINIANS OUT OF LEBANON. THERE WERE TWO MAJOR HURDLES TO BE OVERCOME IN IMPLEMENTING SUCH A PLAN, HOWEVER. ONE WAS THE QUESTION OF ISRAELI ACQUIESCENCE, IF NOT SUPPORT, AND THE OTHER WAS THE PROBLEM OF FINANCING SUCH AN EFFORT. WITH RESPECT TO THE FIRST, KHALIL SAID THAT THE SOUTH LEBANESE COULD NOT OPEN A FRONT AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS UNLESS THEY WERE SURE OF HAVING THE ISRAELIS PROTECT THEIR REAR. THIS WAS OBVIOUSLY A VERY DELICATE QUESTION, SINCE MANY OF THE SOUTH LEBANESE, HOWEVER UNHAPPY THEY WERE ABOUT THE PALESTINIANS, WERE NOT YET QUITE PREPARED TO MOVE AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS "UNDER THE ISRAELI BANNER." KHALIL SAID THAT WHILE HE THOUGHT ISRAEL WOULD WELCOME THIS DEVELOPMENT, HE DID NOT THINK THE ISRAELIS WISHED TO OCCUPY ANY PART OF SOUTH LEBANON OR OTHERWISE BECOME DIRECTLY INVOLVED. ISRAEL WAS MORE INTERESTED IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF THE OPEN BORDER BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES WHICH THEY NOW HAVE AND, OF COURSE, QUIETLY EXPANDING THEIR CONTACTS AND INFLUENCE IN LEBANON. HE SAID THAT HE KNEW ISRAEL WAS ALREADY ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN LEBANON THROUGH THE SUPPLY OF ARMS AND OTHER MILITARY EQUIPMENT INCLUDING CHIEFTAIN TANKS (ONE WHICH HE HAD PERSONALLY SEEN) THROUGH THE PORT OF JOUNIEH. THEY HAVE ALSO TRAINED SMALL CADRES OF LEBANESE IN ISRAEL IN A WIDE VARIETY OF MILITARY SKILLS INCLUDING PILOT TRAINING AND SENT THEM BACK INTO LEBANON.

4. FINANCING SUCH AN OPERATION IS, OF COURSE, THE OTHER OBVIOUS PROBLEM. KHALIL SAID THAT NOT ONLY WOULD THEY HAVE TO ARM, CLOTEH, AND FEED RECRUITS FROM THE SHIA COMMUNITY BUT THEY WOULD HOPE TO ATTRACT NUMEROUS DEFECTORS FROM THE LEBANESE ARAB ARMY AND THEY WOULD HAVE TO BE PAID JUST AS THEY ARE NOW. HE SAID THAT THERE IS WIDESPREAD DISILLUSIONMENT AMONG BOTH OFFICERS AND ENLISTED MEN OF THE LAA WHO NOW FEEL THEY HAD FOUGHT FOR NO USEFUL CAUSE AND GAINED NOTHING. THEY ALSO HAVE BECOME DISILLUSIONED WITH THE PALESTINIANS AND DEFECTION FROM THE LEBANESE ARAB ARMY RANKS IS GAINING MOMENTUM.

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5. WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE POSITION OF IMAN MUSA SAD'R, KHALIL SAID THAT HIS STANDING IN THE SHIA COMMUNITY HAS ERODED TO THE VANISHING POINT. THE ONLY INFLUENCE HE HAS NOW DERIVES FROM HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASAD AND THIS RELATIONSHIP IS FOUNDED MORE ON GROUNDS OF RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATION THAN IT IS ON ASAD'S ESTIMATE OF SAD'R'S STANDING IN THE SHIA COMMUNITY. WHEN SOME DISBELIEF WAS EXPRESSED ON THIS SCORE, KHALIL INSISTED THAT ASAD WAS SOMETHING OF A "ROMANTIC" IN THIS RESPECT AND REFERRED TO ASAD'S POSITION

IN THE ALAWITE COMMUNITY (AN OFFSHOOT OF THE SHIAS) IN WHICH HE IS MORE A MAN AMONG MEN THAN THE PRESIDENT OF SYRIA.

6. AL-KHALIL WAS ASKED ABOUT CURRENT OUTBREAK OF FIGHTING BETWEEN VARIOUS FACTIONS IN THE CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM CAMPS. KHALIL DISMISSED THESE AS LOCALIZED SQUABBLES WHICH IN HIS VIEW WERE A PASSING PHENOMENON. HE SAID THESE DIFFERENCES DID NOT EXTEND TO TOP LEADERSHIP.

7. AS FAR AS SARKIS IS CONCERNED, KHALIL SAID HE HOPED HE WOULD BE INSTALLED AS PRESIDENT TODAY, SEPTEMBER 23, WITHOUT INCIDENT ALTHOUGH HE HAD SOME FEAR FOR SARKIS' PERSONAL SAFETY. IN ANY EVENT, HE DID NOT THINK THAT SARKIS HIMSELF WAS GOING TO MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE IN HOW EVENTS EVELVED IN LEBANON. HE SAID SARKIS HAS NO INDEPENDENT POWER AND CANNOT EVEN MORE HIS GLAS FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER ON THE TABLE WITHOUT THE ACQUIESCENCE OF PERSONALITIES LIKE FRANGIE AND CHAMOUN. AS AN EXAMPLE, HE CITED THE RECENT MEETING BETWEEN SARKIS, ARAFAT, AND GENERAL JAMIL. WHEN SARKIS TELEPHONED FRANGIE TO ASK WHAT HE COULD DO, HE WAS TOLD THERE SHOULD BE NO COMMITMENT OR CONCESSION MADE TO ARAFAT AND THAT LEBANON WAS NOW DETERMINED TO RID ITSELF OF THE PALESTINIANS. AS YOU KNOW, HE SAID, THE TALKS IMMEDIATELY COLLAPSED. KHALIL DID SAY, HOWEVER, THAT THE SYRIANS MIGHT GIVE THE SARKIS PRESIDENCY A BOOST BY MOVING TO COMPLETELY ENCIRCLE BEIRUT AND SECURE THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS. THEY MAY ALSO CO-OPERATE IN ROOTING OUT THE PALESTINIANS IN TRIPOLI, LEAVING IT IN LEBANESE MOSLEM HANDS. INDEED, HE SAID, THIS PROCESS IS UNDER WAY WITH THE ACQUIESCENCE OF THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS.

8. KHALIL SEEMED MORE CHEERFUL THAN THE DCM HAS SEEN HIM ANY TIME IN THE LAST 18 MONTHS. HE APPARENTLY IS PINNING HIGH HOPES ON THE COALESCENCE OF OPINION AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS, INITIALLY BETWEEN THE MOSLEMS OF THE SOUTH AND THE CHRISTIANS OF THE NORTH, WHICH WILL BE JOINED EVENTUALLY BY OTHER LEBANESE OF ALL PERSUA-
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SIONS. IN THIS CONNECTION, HE SAID THAT 80 PERCENT OF THE SHIA AND 50 PERCENT OF THE SUNNIS WERE NOW TOTALLY AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS. KHALIL ALSO SEEMED TO FIND SOME HOPE IN HIS IMPRESSION THAT US POLICY TOWARD LEBANON MAY BE IN THE PRECESS OF CHANGE. HE SAID WITH A BROAD SMILE, "YOU KNOW I WAS IN (CHRISTIAN-HELD) LEBANON WHEN YOUR SPECIAL MISSION VISITED THERE." ALTHOUGH HE SAID HE DID NOT MEET IT, HE LEFT THE IMPRESSION HE WAS WELL BRIEFED ON WHAT HAD TRANSPIRED. THE DCM, OF COURSE, DISCLAIMED ANY KNOWLEDGE OF THE MISSION'S ACTIVITIES, CONCLUSIONS OR RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SAID HE HAD NO KNOWLEDGE OF A SHIFT, PLANNED OR OTHERWISE, IN US POLICY VIS-A-VIS LEBANON.
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